



# One Page Sermon

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### September 5, 2021

#### Kindness Matters: Ruth, Boaz, and the power of the Rom-Com

The romantic comedy is a much-maligned and much-beloved genre of American film. Critics often consider these films unoriginal and not artistic. Fans however, adore them. They have given us immortal moments like when Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan meet at the top of the Empire State Building—or was that Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr?

Watching a rom-com is easy. We know the formula. Two people meet and have a connection, often under serendipitous or comical ways—the “meet-cute.” Then they encounter some kind of obstacle, perhaps they met under false pretenses, there is a mistaken identity, or there is a third party complicating things. Eventually, the obstacle is overcome and the couple lives happily ever after. Yes, they are predictable - but that is part of their charm. That is a part of their power—the familiarity with the genre helps us connect to the characters and feel real emotional attachment.

The story of Ruth fits nicely into this category. Chapter 1 of Ruth sets up the story that unfolds in chapters 2-4. It is the story of Ruth and Boaz have a meet-cute in his field. He sees her, is intrigued by her story, and offers her protection and provision. Ruth then goes to Boaz and offers herself in a vulnerable way (this exchange has some possible double-meaning, which could even be construed as comedy).

Next, Boaz realizes that there is a third party that could get in the way of their plans. When the third party is confronted he balks at the idea of marrying Ruth the Moabite. Eventually, Ruth and Boaz marry, they have a child, and life and celebration is restored this little family that had known nothing but famine and death.

The story of Ruth is a perfect rom-com that can fall under the same criticisms that modern movies can be subject to. Is Ruth empowered by her courage or is she manipulated in a patriarchal society? Is the relationship between Ruth and Boaz a romantic love to be celebrated or was it an economic relationship that benefited them both? These are legitimate concerns of the story of Ruth. Just as modern criticisms of films like *You've Got Mail* and *Legally Blonde* are valid.

These criticisms however, do not negate the power of these stories. A movie like *You've Got Mail* reminded people at the dawn of the internet age that human connection could be facilitated through the faceless computer. When people feared the end of interpersonal connection and the corporate takeover of

retail spaces, the movie provided a salve to the worries of our society.

*Jerry Maguire* reminded us of the joy in the midst of the exploding business side of sports. *Brokeback Mountain*

showed us the danger of denying one's true self. *Titanic* held a mirror up to our modern classist prejudices, and *Legally Blonde* helped mark a new wave of feminism that made the bold point that a woman could be intelligent, smart, empowered, love pink, and 'bend and snap' every now and then.

Ruth also acted as a mirror to the culture which created it. Probably a story told by women, and possibly even written by women, many scholars believe that Ruth and the books of Ezra-Nehemiah are contemporary works.

Ezra reprimanded the people for diluting their culture. He railed against intermarriage and held a strict Judah-first mentality. Yet Ruth the Moabite (Ezra had an explicit prohibition against marrying Moabite women) was a Woman of Valor. Her marriage saved not only Naomi but in time the Israelite people. The Gospel of Matthew calls her a great-grandmother of Jesus. Held in juxtaposition to Ezra's exclusive nature, Ruth acts as a reminder of the power of relationships, kindness, and love.

This is the power of the rom-com. Through the story of a few beloved characters, our understanding of the world is shaped in ways that go beyond lectures and rules. Ezra stood up and preached exclusion. The women told the story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz to show what happens when people connect. God working through the story of Ruth is a reminder everyone has a story, and every story matters.

There are dogmas and doctrines that come from the powerful men like Ezra, but the story of Ruth endures because kindness matters, and it is kindness, courage, love, and loyalty that saved this little family so they could live happily ever after, all the way to Jesus.

